

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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## STATE OF MONTANA

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Dear Colleague:

In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the estimated immunization rates for Montana adolescents aged 13–17 years were lower compared with U.S. adolescents for several recommended vaccinations, including:  $\geq 2$  doses of measles, mumps, rubella vaccine,  $\geq 3$  doses of hepatitis B vaccine,  $\geq 1$  dose of varicella vaccine, and  $\geq 1$  dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine.

In response, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Immunization Program conducted a survey of Montana's pediatricians and Family Medicine physicians aimed at further understanding why adolescent immunization rates are comparatively low in Montana. The results of the survey revealed several key findings:

- The majority of surveyed physicians believe it is "very important" for adolescents to be up-to-date on their immunizations.
- The number of surveyed physicians scheduling return visits for immunizations was low.
- Only 21% of surveyed physicians use immunization reminder/recall systems.
- Surveyed physicians believe the greatest barrier to vaccinating adolescents aged 14–18 years is that adolescent patients rarely make preventive health visits.

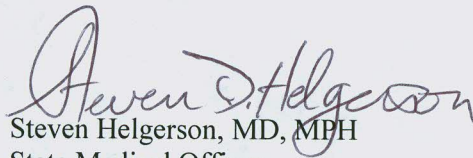
To help increase adolescent immunization rates in Montana, we recommend that health-care providers consider the following:

- Educate the adolescent patient and their parent(s) about the risk of acquiring a vaccine-preventable disease and the importance of immunization.
- Provide patient and parent education to address common misconceptions concerning immunizations and to ensure informed decision-making.
- Use each visit as an opportunity to assess immunization status and provide needed vaccines (e.g., sports or camp physicals, pre-college assessments, well-child visits, and gynecological visits).
- Schedule return visits for immunizations.
- Use reminder/recall systems to communicate to a patient and to a health-care provider that the patient is due for an immunization (**reminder**). In addition, use active outreach by letter or phone to schedule appointments for patients in need of immunization (**recall**).
- Use the Montana Immunization Registry (WIZRD) to access a patient's consolidated immunization record. WIZRD provides immunization information for health-care providers in a wide variety of treatment settings.

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For your review, please see the enclosed summary of the survey report. You can also read the full survey report by visiting the following website:

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/PHSD/Immunization/immune-index.shtml>.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steven Helgerson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steven" and last name "Helgerson" clearly distinguishable.

Steven Helgerson, MD, MPH

State Medical Officer

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